

Posted by u/ack1308 4 months ago

[PI] The Puzzle

OC PI

Inspired by: **[WP] An archaeologist had spent years researching fossils around the globe. One day, while going through fossil records, he realizes that there is a time period of around a hundred years in the middle of the Mesozoic era where no fossils can be found.**

"Okay, that's weird."

I looked around. Most people think the most exciting phrase in science is, "Look at my new discovery!" but in fact it is along the lines of 'that's weird'. A new discovery *isn't* a new discovery until it's been differentiated from all the old discoveries, and to do that, one has to notice something strange about it.

"What's weird?" I wandered over to where Maria was driving our new scanning electron microscope like Mario Andretti on a rainy track.

She didn't look up from the eyepieces. "We got some samples in from the Bajocian dig in Libya. They reported some kind of discontinuity right in the middle of the layer, so I said I'd check it out."

"Okay, so far I'm on the same page," I said. The Bajocian Age had fallen slap-bang in the middle of the Jurassic Period, covering a two million year stretch from about 170.3 million years ago to 168.3 Ma. I remembered reading that it was named after the Latin name for Bayeux (yup, same as the tapestry). It was mainly defined by the fossils of a particular type of ammonite. "So what's caught your eye?"

"There's definitely a discontinuity here," she said, still concentrating. "If I'm not much mistaken, it's about ten thousand years deep."

I blinked, impressed. Ten thousand years was barely a blip on the radar when it came to paleontology. We had *rounding errors* bigger than that. "So what's it made up of? A local meteor strike? A volcanic eruption that knocked out the local wildlife for a few millennia?"

"I ... don't want to say what it looks like, before you see it for yourself." This didn't sound like Maria at all. Normally, she was as hard-charging as anyone you'd ever meet. But she stood away from the eyepieces, and waved me into place.

So I stepped in, and fitted my eyes to the microscope. At first, I wasn't sure what I was seeing. It wasn't the normal run of fossils, to be sure. But then, as I touched the controls, I found myself zooming in on one point and another, and a picture started

emerging. My breath caught in my throat.

"Do you see it, too?" Maria's voice sounded like it was coming from far away.

I looked again, then moved the microscope to a different section. It hadn't been a fluke. Slowly, I took my face away from the eyepieces and looked at Maria. "Tell me right now if this is a joke or a hoax, and I'll overlook it," I said, my voice unusually harsh. "Then I'll want to know how you pulled it off."

"It's not." She was hugging herself. "One hundred percent genuine. All the dating techniques check out."

"Well, crap." I took a deep breath. "So, which of us gets to go to the Director and tell him that we've located a high-tech circuitboard, complete with capacitors, in the middle of a rock that's supposed to be a hundred and seventy million years old?"

"How about we don't?" Maria's voice was speculative.

I frowned. "What?"

"We don't tell him." Maria gestured fluidly. "Think about it. No matter how we report this, we will *automatically* get called fakers and hoaxers by about half the scientific community. Then there's the crazies who will mob us looking for proof of ancient gods, time travel, the flat earth, and who knows what else. Our careers will functionally be *gone*."

Her logic was impeccable, but I had to know what she was thinking. "So what are you saying? We sit on this? The greatest discovery of the age? Do we *destroy* it?"

She made a sharp gesture of negation. "No. We keep it, we study every aspect of it, and we try to gather more. We investigate this under the table until we *understand* it. And only then--and not before--do we tell anyone."

I nodded slowly. Having my career go down the drain was not my ideal plan. "Okay, then. Let's do this."

Ten Years Later

"Okay, ready." Maria stepped back behind the makeshift blast shield. "Recorders running."

I nodded and entered the final commands. We'd reverse-engineered the temporal drone from the fossilised remains of the one we'd found in the Libya dig. The timer ticked down while I joined her behind the shield.

As the numbers hit zero, the drone soundlessly vanished, like a movie special effect. One point three seconds later, it reappeared in the same spot (I'd programmed that interval in, so that we'd know it had been gone). We retrieved the video chip, and plugged it into the player.

Seconds later, we were watching sound and video that nobody had seen before; authentic imagery of the Jurassic period. I looked at Maria, and she at me, and we high-fived.

"We need to build more drones," I said.

"What? Why?"

I shrugged. "Well, we know we're going to lose at least one."

She got a speculative look on her face. "No. This was designed *somewhere*. We didn't design it. We just found it. Where did it actually come from?"

That was the big question. Up until then, I'd blithely assumed that we'd found one of our own. But of course we hadn't. How could we have?

So what I have to ask myself is ... who sent the drone back that crashed in the middle of the Bajocian Age and supplied us with the tech?

Who built it?

Was it you?